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WHAT THE UNIONISTS HAVE DONE FOR IRELAND.

BY T. W. RUSSELL, M. P., SECRETARY OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT BOARD.

WITH the passage of the Irish Local Government Bill things have now reached a point at which it is possible to take stock of the policy of the Unionist Party in Ireland—when it is even desirable to cast up the accounts and to ascertain what the position really is. At the election of 1886 the policy of setting up an Irish Parliament was negatived in the most decided manner by the constituencies. In 1895 the condemnation of that policy was even more emphatic. But neither of these verdicts was given on the assumption that everything was right, or as it ought to be, in Ireland. They were delivered, on the contrary, after the fullest admission by the Unionist leaders that there were grievances to be redressed and wrongs to be righted, and it was clearly affirmed that the Imperial Parliament was at once able and willing to do what was right by Ireland and her people. Lord Hartington, all through the dogged and splendid resistance he offered to Mr. Gladstone's first Home Rule Bill, took this ground. Mr. Balfour and Mr. Chamberlain were equally emphatic. And now that three years of strong Unionist administration have come and gone since

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1895, it is alike interesting and desirable to ask where we stand—what has been done and what remains to be accomplished? The Irish question, apart, of course, from the demand for the restoration of national rights, may be thus summarized: (1.) Land reform; (2.) Local government; (3.) The Western problem; (4.) Higher education.

I propose to deal with each of these subjects. My contention is that, with one exception, they have been recognized by the Unionist Party to require, not only attention, but radical treatment, and that before the present Parliament expires they are, with the exception referred to, almost certain to be dealt with and satisfactorily settled. I go further and venture to maintain that, when these **great issues** are satisfactorily settled, no sectional grievance of any importance will remain. Social legislation will, of course, be demanded. Administrative reform will be necessary. As the country progresses new problems will necessarily spring up. But these problems will affect the whole people, and will not demand exceptional or sectional treatment. It is, therefore, of supreme importance that, in order to reach this point, what remains of British prejudice in regard to Ireland should be overcome. The Irish Representatives no longer hold the balance of power in the House of Commons. They are hopelessly divided among themselves. They appear to hate each other far more than they hate "the common enemy." And it is perfectly true that with the revised procedure of Parliament they can be defied. I believe, however, that the Government and the House of Commons ought to resist this great temptation; that, while setting their foot firmly **down** on the policy of dismemberment, they ought with patience, and even with some sacrifice, to endeavor to undo the wrongs of the past, and so put themselves right in the eyes of the civilized world. Let us see how far this Unionist policy has been carried out. I begin with the

QUESTION OF THE LAND.

Where do we stand on this crucial question? It is impossible to deny that during the last year or two a certain sympathy has begun to grow up in favor of the Irish landlords. Agricultural depression has resulted in the serious cutting down of rents, and it is to be feared that this process has meant the ruin of many a man upon whom the extravagance and sins of his fathers have

been visited. This may or may not be an ignorant sympathy, because, in the first place, the fall in the price of agricultural produce has everywhere necessitated a serious reduction in rent; and, secondly, because the outcry against the Land Commission as a partial tribunal, which brought Sir Edward Fry and his colleagues on to the stage, has been finally disproved by the authority of the Fry commission itself. But the sympathy has undoubtedly arisen. It was inevitable that in such a work as fixing the rents of the farmers of Ireland there should be many mistakes, and that circumstances should even at times have involved carelessness and hurry. But on the question of the impartiality of the tribunal, Sir Edward Fry's words are conclusive:

"We are convinced, as we have already shown, that the settlement of fair rents has been effected in an unsatisfactory manner—with diversity of opinion and practice—sometimes with carelessness, and sometimes with that bias toward one side or the other which exists in many honest minds; but we are also convinced that the administration of justice has not been poisoned by any systematic endeavors on the part of the Commissioners or of the Assistant Commissioners to benefit either side at the expense of the other."

Not in the least surprised, therefore, at the outcry of the Landowners' Convention, and not believing that rents have been unduly reduced, I come to look at the question from the standpoint of the tenant. Has justice at last been done? If not, what remains to be accomplished?

When I was a boy the Irish tenant was in the main a mere serf. Denied all political rights, he had no legal right to his own property in the soil. If he built his own home—which was usually the case—it belonged to the landlord. If he reclaimed, drained or fenced his land, it was mainly done on the security of a yearly tenancy, and he was liable to eviction, and he was often evicted without a farthing of compensation. Hence the shape of the demand in the forties and fifties by the League of North and South. Men like Sharman Crawford, Gavan Duffy and Dr. McKnight combined for one purpose. They asked for security of tenure and legal protection for the property of the tenant. Truly, a moderate and a modest demand. But what fate awaited it? Sir Joseph Napier, the representative of Trinity College, and the Irish Attorney-General in Lord Derby's Administration, introduced a bill in 1854 which met the demand fairly, and might have settled the question for a generation. But the Irish land-

lords would have none of it. The bill perished. Reasonable reform was refused. The lapse of half a century has brought loss and trouble, ending with revolution. The revolution commenced with Mr. Gladstone's bill of 1870. It was practically completed by the Acts of 1881 and 1887. These great measures suffered severely in the Irish courts. But the Morley Committee of 1894, shedding the clear light of day upon the actual facts, paved the way for and rendered absolutely necessary the Act of 1896, by which many of the decisions of the Irish Court of Appeal, however right they may have been in strict law, were reversed as being against public policy and the intention of Parliament, with the result that the tenant's advocate no longer feels when he enters the court that he is treading on a series of trapdoors.

Under the various enactments passed since 1870, the Irish tenant has now secured, among many other things:

- (1.) Absolute security of tenure on payment of a fair rent.
- (2.) A fair rent, fixed by a tribunal set up by Parliament.
- (3.) The right to sell his interest in the tenancy to the highest bidder.
- (4.) Absolute protection for his improvements, and the presumption, with certain limitations, as to ownership in his favor.
- (5.) Facilities for purchase where the owner agrees to sell, the whole purchase money being advanced by the state.
- (6.) Compulsory sale of bankrupt estates in the Land Judges' Courts to the tenants.

The bare enumeration of these rights must convince every fair-minded man that Parliament has gone a very long way toward making an end of the Irish land question. I quite admit that there are points left unsettled, and that the question of the administration of the acts by the Land Commission is of enormous importance. But no one can now say, assuming that things remain as they are, that the Land Law as it affects agricultural tenancies is unjust. It may doubtless permit of individual cases of hardship. The depression in agriculture may make it hard for the farmers to live. But the law is now substantially just in theory, and, notwithstanding mistakes, is on the whole reasonably administered.

One matter, however, of great importance stands out, requiring attention and careful handling. By the Act of 1896 it was proposed to clear the Land Judges' Court of all those bankrupt es-

tates for which a receiver had been appointed by the court. There are hundreds of such properties in the court. Grave difficulties have, however, arisen in the administration of the 40th section of this act. Under this section the Land Judge claims that he alone has the right to decide the price at which the estate may be sold, and that the duty of the Land Commission is confined to valuing the land for the purposes of sale. The contention of the Land Commission is that the Land Purchase Acts apply to estates in the Land Judges' Court, in the same way as they apply to the estates of ordinary vendors.

In this way a complete deadlock has been brought about. Mr. Justice Ross is supposed to take a somewhat liberal view in dealing with the money of the British taxpayer, and in fixing the price to be paid for these bankrupt estates. The Land Commission, on the other hand, is suspected of somewhat narrow dealing—suspected, that is to say, of overlooking the fact that the state in advancing the money has the interest of both landlord and tenant as security for the advance. It is to be hoped, now that the Court of Appeal has decided against the contention of the Land Judge, now that it has been decided that Mr. Justice Ross has no power under the act to “ladle out the money” of the British taxpayer to the mortgagees of bankrupt Irish landowners, a way out of the serious difficulty may be found.

This, however, is administration. The intention of Parliament is clear. What the Act of 1896 intended to do was to clear the Land Judges' Court of these estates, to abolish a huge Rent Office managed by the state, and to give to the tenants on these estates the option of purchase.

To my mind, then, on the land question the Imperial Parliament has gone as far in principle as an Irish Parliament could or ought to go. And the Land Law, so far as agricultural tenancies are concerned, being now substantially just, all that Parliament can do is to see that the Purchase Acts have a free course, and that the Law of Tenure is administered without fear, favor or affection.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT.

It is now almost sixty years since Lord John Russell promised to substitute County Boards for Grand Juries, in answer to the demand of O'Connell. Sixty years is no doubt a long time to wait. But it has not all been loss. I doubt whether the Irish people

sixty years ago were ready for local self government. Indeed, I am sure they were not. And in connection with this point it ought to be remembered that England, Wales and Scotland only received this right in 1888 and 1889. But, be this as it may, the revolution has come, and come with a vengeance. Mr. Gerald Balfour's bill is thorough, whatever else it may be. Let us roughly set out what it proposes to do.

(1.) It arranges for the transfer of all the administrative functions of the Grand Juries to County Councils elected on a popular franchise, *i. e.*, the parliamentary, *plus* peers and women.

(2.) It changes the entire incidence of rating, making the occupier everywhere liable for a consolidated rate.

(3.) It provides for the payment out of Imperial funds of half of the County Cess now paid wholly by the occupier, and the half of the Poor Rate now paid by the owner. This involves a contribution from Imperial sources of something like £730,000 *per annum*.

(4.) It vests the management and control of lunatic asylums in a Visiting Committee, to be chosen by the County Council.

(5.) It provides for the establishment of Rural District Councils, the members of which will be the Sanitary Authority, and will be elected on the same franchise as the County Councillors.

(6.) It confines the Poor Law authorities, *i. e.*, the Boards of Guardians, to poor law work, and transfers everything foreign to that work to either the County or the Rural District Council.

(7.) It abolishes *ex-officio* Guardians, the property qualification for election and plural voting, and substitutes vote by ballot for the present plan of voting by papers.

(8.) It assimilates the franchise in boroughs and small towns to that in force in the country.

These are some of the leading provisions in what has been justly called "this revolutionary measure." For it is a revolution. If I were to assume that things in Ireland were to continue as they are now, that the battle for place on these Councils was to be fought on party or religious grounds, the bill would mean the transfer of every atom of power to the Nationalists and Catholics in 27 out of the 32 Irish Counties. As to the remaining four Counties, it would mean that in Antrim, Down and Derry the Presbyterians would settle accounts with the Episcopalians, and that the latter body would hold Armagh.

I look forward to nothing of the kind—for these, among other reasons. Many highly intelligent Nationalists are seriously exercised in their minds as to the working out of this great scheme. In most of the Counties the people are wholly unaccustomed to work of this kind. The educated men of many districts, apart from the country gentry, consist of the priests and the shopkeepers, and the former class are wholly excluded from election by the bill. For a Home Rule Parliament each County could easily have found four capable men, either inside or outside its bounds, as representatives. To find 30 or 40 County Councillors who must be residents is a wholly different matter. And the Nationalists I refer to, view with some apprehension such an experiment as Mr. Gerald Balfour proposes. For, of course, a breakdown in County Government would be very injurious, if not absolutely fatal, to the National demand. The Unionists would say at once: “If you cannot manage the affairs of a County or a District, how are you to manage those of a Nation?” This very difficulty, and the necessity for ensuring that no breakdown shall take place, will necessitate the election of a certain number of those Unionists who, on the Grand Juries and other public boards, have been accustomed to do the public work of the County or District. This necessity for co-operation will therefore tend to break down the strong party feeling which now exists. And I look upon it as certain that a considerable number of those Unionist country gentlemen who have been accustomed to County work will find seats on the new boards.

But there is another and a better ground upon which I reach the same conclusion. I refer to the sensible decay of party feeling in Ireland. There are many Protestants who have strenuously resisted the demand for an Irish Parliament, who, admitting the strength of the Nationalist case from certain standpoints, desire to co-operate heartily with the majority of the people, where co-operation is possible. They do not think that the government of Ireland by England has always been wise. Indeed, up to 1868, it abounded in mistakes sufficient to madden a sensitive people. Short of a separate Legislature, they desire to pay respectful attention to every reasonable demand made on behalf of the majority of the Irish people. I know this to be a growing feeling among educated Protestants. This bill, and this is one of its chief attractions for me, will enormously foster this feeling. It is only a few

months since Roman Catholics gained admission to the corporations of Belfast and Londonderry. They were, of course, excluded not on account of their religion, but by the franchise which prevailed in the one case, and by the arrangement of the wards in the other. What has been the result? Extreme men on the Protestant side fretted and fumed. Deputations tried to persuade Members of Parliament of the mischief that would be certain to ensue. Is the business of these Irish towns anything the worse for the admixture of a handful of "mere papists" in the Town Councils? No one—not the extremest of Orangemen—will say so. A great blot on the administration of these towns has been removed, and the air is all the sweeter for the removal of this grievance.

Look at the House of Commons itself. Ten years ago no man knew what a sitting would bring forth. The Irish Nationalist members were at war with the House. Years before I entered Parliament I had been on terms of friendship with such men as Mr. Healy, Mr. Sexton, Mr. Sullivan and Mr. Jordan. But the stress and strain of this acute daily warfare severed all friendships and made us almost personal foes. We agreed on many things, and we knew that we agreed. But such was the bitterness of the strife that all agreement was lost sight of in the daily feud that raged. This feeling has, I rejoice to think, passed away. I can now meet and consult with Irish Nationalists on Irish questions. At a critical moment in the history of the Morley Land Committee in 1894, when the Unionists left the room and washed their hands of the whole business, I was able to remain in my seat and co-operate heartily with Mr. Dillon, Mr. Healy and Mr. Sexton in drawing a report which necessitated the Act of 1896, and I can with confidence assert that no act of mine in Parliament has more entirely commended itself to the people I represent than this one, which would have been impossible ten years ago. Colonel Sanderson can now preside over a meeting of Irish Members, representing every party, to discuss the financial relations between Great Britain and Ireland. And, speaking generally, a truce has been called.

This blessed spirit has been apparent all through the discussions on the Local Government Bill. From the first there has been a section of Irish Unionists who disliked the bill. These gentlemen did not take the ground that out and out resistance

ought to be offered to it. No such line of battle was possible. It was felt to be absurd that powers and privileges conferred ten years ago upon the laborers of Dorset and Devon should be withheld from the Irish farmer. But the demand for "safeguards," for a minority vote, for the disfranchisement of illiterates, for double member constituencies, and for other restrictions calculated to lessen the voting power of the majority of the Irish people, was persistent. It is greatly to the credit of Colonel Saunderson, Colonel Waring and Mr. Wm. Johnston—all three typical Orangemen—that they have stood firmly by the bill and have not sought to embarrass the Government. These gentlemen have followed this course, although denounced by their organs in the press and on platforms. And it is only just and fair to recognize the fact. What the outcome of it all may be is another matter. It is a great experiment. It is not too much to say that its success will depend wholly upon the spirit shown by the Irish leaders on both sides. If religion and politics do not get the upper hand in the elections, if the best and most competent men are chosen as Councillors, if there is a general determination to let the dead past bury its dead and to work in the future for the good of the country, then Mr. Gerald Balfour's bill will bring with it a healing power for which all men will be found to speak him well. But whatever comes, this fact cannot be questioned—the Irish people will have got the complete management of their local affairs. In this respect they will be in exactly the same position of England, Scotland and Wales.

HIGHER EDUCATION.

Upon this question much might have been said twelve months ago. Little I fear can, or need, be said to-day. Five and twenty years ago Mr. Gladstone made a courageous effort to deal with this question—the most difficult and thorny question in Irish politics. The great man failed in his effort—failed because of the opposition of Trinity College, Dublin, and of the Irish Roman Catholic Bishops. During the present year Mr. Arthur Balfour, the ablest and the most popular leader the Conservative party has seen for many years, has approached the question afresh from another standpoint. I am afraid it must be said that he, too, has failed, although he has had the support of Trinity College and the good will of the Roman Catholic representatives in Parlia-

ment. After a two days' debate in the House of Commons, in which the whole weight of the House, as well as of the argument, was in favor of the views expressed by the First Lord of the Treasury, it was felt that the question could not be taken up by the Government without the certainty of dividing the Unionist party in a way that the Government could not risk. Mr. Balfour did not contemplate, as is generally supposed, the establishment and endowment of a Roman Catholic university, pure and simple. What he did contemplate was the establishment and endowment of a second University in Ireland on lines acceptable to Roman Catholics, *i. e.*, a university whose doors, offices and emoluments would be open to all creeds, as in the case of the University of Dublin, but the board or governing body of which should be Roman Catholic, just as the Senate of the University of Dublin is Protestant. Whatever grievance the Roman Catholics of Ireland may have in connection with this matter, and personally I think it a very real and serious grievance, there is not the slightest use in attempting to conceal the fact that the "No Popery" feeling in certain parts of England and Scotland, the strong Nonconformist view against even the indirect endowment of religion by the state, added to the opposition of Ulster, all combine to make the task almost an impossibility. I regret it on every ground. In the first place it makes a good Home Rule argument. I cannot say in the future what I have always maintained in the past—that the Imperial Parliament is alike able and willing to remedy every Irish grievance. I admit the grievance here. And I have, also, to admit that Anti-Roman prejudice is still strong enough to prevent the application of a remedy. I regret it, also, because of the injury accruing to Ireland by the refusal. It is all very well to say that Ireland is a country of small farmers and that it is the means of earning their daily bread, not university education, that is wanted. But what would Scotland have been if this argument had prevailed? It is the glory of that part of the United Kingdom that the sons of the common people have gone from the parish school to Edinburgh, Glasgow, Aberdeen or St. Andrews, and that as a result they have conferred honor and renown on the land of their birth in every part of the world. The way ought to be open in Ireland as it has been and is now in Scotland. It is not technically barred at present so far as the state is concerned. Trinity College, the Queen's Colleges and the Royal University

are open to all creeds. This is quite true. But as regards Trinity and the Queen's, both institutions are banned by the Church, while the Royal is a mere examining body, and not much of that. A Roman Catholic lad whose parents desire that he should receive the advantages of university education ought not to be compelled to get it at the expense of his conscientious convictions. He ought not to be forced to transgress the law and disobey the mandate of his Church. At all events, the question, I fear, is settled for the present Parliament, and settled in a way that is certain to produce mischief and trouble in the future.

THE WESTERN PROBLEM.

I have now given a brief sketch of the present situation as regards three questions of first-class importance—the Land, Local Government and Higher Education. I come now to consider another problem occupying public attention, upon which some action is clearly desirable—the condition of large numbers of people in certain parts of the South and West, commonly described as the congested districts. Special attention has been lately concentrated upon these areas by the failure of the potato crop and the consequent want and distress which invariably follow in the train of this calamity. Here, the question of the extent of this distress, and the best methods of dealing with it, does not arise. I wish to get behind the distress itself to the causes which produce it, and to the remedies which are capable of being applied.

Visiting these districts, and witnessing the extreme poverty of the people, one cannot help asking what the conditions of life must have been prior to 1847, when the population was double what it is to-day. But even with the clearances that have taken place since that dread period, the evidences of which are visible to the naked eye to-day, the cry of want and distress comes to the doors of Parliament with unfailing regularity. Given the slightest failure in the potato crop, the resources of the Poor Law are immediately strained, relief works in some shape or other are called for, demoralization at once sets in, and the whole country is humiliated. Why should such a state of affairs exist? These districts form part of a country rich beyond the dreams of avarice. The annual budget of the United Kingdom amounts to £112,000,000, sterling. The country is full of realized wealth. Its industrial progress is one of the wonders of the world. It can spend £130,-

000,000 *per annum* on alcoholic luxuries without apparent suffering. Why, then, should a state of affairs such as exists within this limited and well-defined area be allowed to go on—getting worse, as some people think, rather than better, as the years go round?

The first thing necessary here is to get at the facts. Roughly speaking, the area to be dealt with lies on the western seaboard of Ireland, and includes certain portions of Kerry, Mayo, Galway and Donegal. The actual facts of the problem are simple in the extreme. In these parts of Ireland agriculture, or what goes by that name, is the sole industry. As a result of the famine of 1847, cattle and sheep have taken to a very large extent the place of human beings. Great tracts of country have been turned into sheep walks. The best of the land has been given over to grazing and the people are left to scratch the mountain side or to reclaim patches from among the rocks. Life is impossible for people under such circumstances. The young men go to England and Scotland for the harvest—where their labor is greatly appreciated. Young girls go to domestic service. Others go to America. And from all three sources a revenue is obtained which in normal times just suffices to keep body and soul together. From the land itself subsistence for a family is impossible. The people grow potatoes, with the result that, using the same seed year by year, the land gets worn out. Then come failure and relief works. They rear small cattle on the bleak mountain sides—animals that are hardly worth rearing and which produce little or nothing when they are reared. Out of much of such land no economic rent is possible, and no landlord can have any real interest in anything there save in a radical reform of the whole plan of living. In normal times the diet of thousands of these people is more meagre than that of the ordinary pauper in the worst of our English work-houses. I saw recently that an accomplished correspondent of a smart daily paper confessed his inability to find “the famine” that was being insisted on by the Irish members in Parliament. But this same gentleman admitted to the full the wretched conditions under which the people lived and the necessity of dealing with the problem itself.

Now, although this statement will be challenged, it cannot be fairly said that the Government have shown any lack of consideration in this matter. Some years ago Mr. Arthur Balfour persuaded Parliament to make a free grant of £1,250,000 (and this

has since been supplemented by a very large sum) for railways to traverse some of these districts. The lines are all open for traffic and are being worked by the great trunk lines of the country. In 1891 Mr. Balfour took another step, and one which may yet turn out to be the means of dealing effectively with the difficulty—he established the Congested Districts Board. This body consists of certain gentlemen selected by the Irish Government, who are charged with the duty of assisting the people of these districts in a variety of ways. They have an annual income of £42,000 derived from a capital sum taken from the Irish Church surplus. Beyond all doubt their work has been of importance—not alone in the paths they have gone, but in pointing out the possibilities. Two or three things must be said at this point. The first is that something ought to be done to make the holdings occupied by these people more adequate than they now are. The land at the best is wretched in character. But reclaimed bog grows good potatoes, and, if the potato crop turns out well trouble diminishes. The Congested Districts Board have already pointed the way in this respect. They have purchased certain small estates, and, by getting rid of the grazing tenants, they have been enabled to add the land thus acquired to the small and inadequate holdings of the tenants. They have repaired the cabins, made farm roads, mended the fences and built schools. And when all this has been done, they have sold the holdings to the tenants under the Land Purchase Acts—with the result that they pay as a terminable annuity to the state for the enlarged holdings very little more than they paid to the old landlord as a perpetual rent for the smaller area. If the Congested Districts Board had never done anything but this one thing—and it has done much more—it would have fully justified its existence. Of course, this remedy is not capable of universal application. But in a great many districts the grazing land is there. No one proposes to take it without the fullest compensation. But, if ever state interference could be justified, it would be here and under these circumstances. With more money to work upon, the Congested Districts Board could do much, even without compulsion.

But this is only the first step in the work. These people have many splendid virtues. They endure hardship, suffering and hunger under the conviction that it is the will of God. This for them is enough. But whatever their virtues may be, they know nothing

of the arts by which a country prospers. They are not in reality farmers. They are in fact fifty or a hundred years behind even the rest of Ireland. With enlarged holdings will come the necessity for some form of agricultural education. And even then the land will not suffice for the people. Centres such as Carna and Carraroe will have somehow or other to be thinned out, and cottage industries introduced. All this the Congested Districts Board have on hand. Their operations are only limited by their financial resources. It is money that is required. And for the enlargement of holdings it is not a free grant, but a loan, that is needed. I believe that those who are responsible for the government of Ireland are fully alive to the problem and are anxious to solve it. No miracle can be worked. Time, money, firmness and patience are alike necessary. And as it is only an extension of work already sanctioned and begun that is necessary, I hope and believe that the present Parliament will not cease to exist without laying the foundation for better days in these long-neglected and, in many cases, beautiful regions. It ought not to be said that:

"In a climate soft as a mother's smile,
With a soil fruitful as God's love,
The Irish people starve."

AGRICULTURE AND INDUSTRIES BOARD.

Next session will probably see the re-introduction of the Agriculture and Industries Bill—a measure which was introduced and withdrawn by Mr. Gerald Balfour in 1897. This bill proposes to establish an Agriculture and Industries Department, with a special board, whose duty it will be to foster and encourage the backward agriculture of certain districts, and to aid in establishing industries that will act as a supplement thereto. The measure has much more support outside Parliament than within its walls. It is the outcome of a remarkable movement* which culminated in what was called the "Recess Committee"—a body composed of men of all parties who place their trust for the future of Ireland in the development of its industrial resources, rather than in political reforms. The report of the Recess Committee undoubtedly produced a great effect upon public opinion. It showed how much the state had done on the Continent of Europe in aid of agriculture and other industries, and how little had been done in

* This movement was fully described in an article entitled "The Irish Question in a New Light," contributed to the January (1898) number of this REVIEW by the Right Hon. Horace Plunkett, M. P., Chairman of the Recess Committee and President of the Irish Agricultural Organization Society.—ED. N. A. R.

this respect for Ireland. A great impetus has also been given to the movement by the steady growth and success of the Irish Agricultural Organization Society, a body which is steadily reforming the butter industry by means of co-operative creameries and other agencies. There can be no doubt that there is a wide field for operations of this character. Much is being done by the organization I have referred to and by the Congested Districts Board. And the establishment of popular County and District Government will enable more to be done. In this work the state may very well be asked to bear a part, and the carriage of the bill abandoned in 1897 would be another large step in the material regeneration of the country.

From what I have said, it will be apparent that, so far as the real needs of Ireland are concerned, there has been no neglect by the Legislature during the present Parliament. The alternative policy to Home Rule is being steadily brought to the front and applied. A policy such as that which has been pursued without faltering has, of course, given rise to much searching of heart among many Unionists. The land-owning class, many of them overwhelmed by mortgages and family charges, have not welcomed the Land Act of 1896. Nobody expected they would do so. And it would be idle to deny that the calamities by which many of them have been overtaken have elicited a volume of sympathy which made the task of the Government very difficult. Similarly, as regards Local Government, the old governing class, and a section of the extreme Orangemen in Ulster, have bitterly resented what means in reality their disestablishment. But the feeling of resentment has been by no means universal, and sensible men everywhere have realized that it was impossible to maintain the old non-representative and exclusive system of County and District Government. But the Government, undeterred by abuse, and heedless of threats, which, of course, were as impotent as they were foolish, have carried out the pledges given since 1886, and a few months now will see the local affairs of Ireland committed to the management of the Irish people. A great experiment truly, and one assuredly worth making. I am told it will prove the prelude to Home Rule, and that its successful working will ensure the larger and more ambitious scheme. This view is held by Lord Spencer and a large number of English Liberals. My own view, however, is of a directly opposite character. The Home

Rule movement has gone back—not forward. The death of Mr. Gladstone must also tend to further disintegration on the question. For old Liberals who never felt sure of their policy, but who were devoted and with good cause to “the Grand Old Man,” will now feel free to act on their own views. They will say—they are already saying*—that the Local Government Bill is as much of Home Rule as they ever really wished to confer upon Ireland, and they will weaken the ranks of the Home Rule Liberals by this plea. It is also becoming more and more apparent that any real alliance of the British Liberals with the Irish Home Rule party is out of the question. It is not only on the question of education that their ways lie apart. They approach other questions from wholly different standpoints. And even if the views here expressed were baseless, I see no hope for an Irish Parliament within any period to which a practical politician cares to look forward. Given the defeat of the Unionist party at the next election—a not impossible contingency—what then? Where is the leader of the Liberals? Where is the Liberal policy? Under no conceivable circumstances can the Liberals sweep the country. A majority of 30 or 40, inclusive of the Irish vote, is the utmost they can hope for. Will they satisfy the Irish demand? If so, shipwreck awaits them on a Home Rule bill. Will they refuse to do so? They will be out of office in a week through the opposition of the Irish vote.

Under all these circumstances, it is something for men who care more for the welfare of the people than for systems of government to feel that much is being accomplished for Ireland, that grievances are being redressed, wrongs righted and justice done. This is what is going on in Ireland under the auspices of the Unionist party, to the satisfaction of all well-wishers of the country.

T. W. RUSSELL.

* See Mr. Burton's letter to the Hon. R. Spencer, *East Herts Election*, June 21, 1898.